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Researching a Risky Business? The Use of Freedom of Information to Explore Counterterrorism Security at Museums in the United Kingdom

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Abstract

This article reflects on the value and limitations of the use of Freedom of Information (FOI) in the collection of data on counterterrorism policies and practices at museums in the United Kingdom (UK). In doing so, this article re-interprets the museum within the “single narrative” of global jihadist terrorism before using FOI to uncover counterterrorism security measures at museums in the UK. We particularly signpost the importance of the role of the museum security manager as the interface between the museum and the wider UK counterterrorism network. Throughout, but particularly in the discussion section, the article reflects on the value and limitations of FOI as a social research tool. The conclusion highlights the requirement for further qualitative enquiry into the museum as an emerging site of counterterrorism security discourse and practice, particularly in relation to how museum security managers understand and navigate this unique cultural space.

Introduction

Recent events in Paris and London have demonstrated how the museum represents a target for terrorist activity. On 3 February 2017 in Paris, at around 10am local time, an Egyptian man, Abdullah Reda al-Hamamy, was shot five times outside the Louvre. Al-Hamamy had used a machete to attack a security patrol protecting the museum. More recently, in mid-2017, details emerged from a court case in London that indicated how a network of Islamic State–linked fighters, one of whom was killed in Syria, had sought to acquire firearms and explosives in furtherance of a plan to conduct a terrorist attack at the British Museum in London. In mid-2018 a London-based teenager, Safaa Boular, became Britain’s youngest convicted female Islamic State terrorist, after the court heard how Boular had planned this attack at the British Museum when she was seventeen. Such evidence supports the case that museums, in Western Europe at least, can be considered as coming within the operational purview and targeting calculus of jihadist terrorists. That museums have recently featured as terrorist targets in Paris and London would be unsurprising to the keenest of observers: museums have been a site of a terrorist violence from a diverse range of groups, on multiple occasions and in a variety of jurisdictions in the past decade, including in the United States in 2009,¹ Belgium in 2014,² and Tunisia in 2015.³ The security impact of such terrorist attacks can spread beyond the targeted country. For example, media reports following the 2017 Louvre incident indicated that the National Gallery and the British Museum in London, and other museums including those in Manchester and Liverpool, had implemented enhanced counterterrorism security measures following consultation with, among other agencies, the police. These measures included prohibiting members of the public from entering museums with large items of luggage and the checking of all bags upon entry due to concerns that such items may contain explosive devices or weapons.⁴

In response to such developments this article uses Freedom of Information (FOI) requests to uncover the recent development of counterterrorism security practices at museums in the United Kingdom (UK); a subject on which there is a paucity of previous literature or research.⁵ Particular research interest is afforded to how police and security agencies communicate terrorist threats to museums and how these are received by those responsible for recommending and implementing counterterrorism security measures in the museum environment. In doing so, this article develops two key lines of inquiry. First, from an analytical perspective, the contemporary museum is re-interpreted within the context of a “single narrative” of global jihadist terrorism, an outlook that justifies and legitimizes the targeting of sociocultural sites from both instrumental and symbolic perspectives. Attention is given to the ways in which museums in the UK—many of which exemplify the recent shift from the “old” to the “new” museum—fulfill the criteria for terrorist target selection and have featured in both jihadist propaganda and operational activity. Second, using data collected from FOI requests, the article uncovers the nature of current counterterrorism security practices at museums. This section particularly signposts the important role of the museum security manager as the interface between the museum and the UK counterterrorism policing and security network. Throughout, but particularly in the discussion section, the article reflects on the value and limitations of FOI as a social research tool. The conclusion highlights the requirement for further qualitative inquiry into the museum as an emerging site of counterterrorism security discourse and practice, particularly in relation to how museum security managers understand and navigate this unique cultural space.

Re-interpreting the museum as a terrorist target

The museum, as a sociocultural institution, symbolizes and communicates the particular values of the political community within which it is located. If Western European nation-states can be appropriately considered as “imagined communities”⁶ then the museum has historically played a central role in this process of imagination.⁷ Nick Prior has documented how museums were central to state formation in nineteenth-century Europe⁸; an approach that renders the targeting of the Louvre intelligible. Such an interpretation of the museum is not one that can be confined to the annals of history, nor solely to state-building in France. The contemporary museum has remained, in a modernist sense, an expression of state power, wealth, success, and status, particularly through the global expansion beyond its European roots in a rapidly reconfiguring international political landscape.⁹ However, the museum has not remained a static idea. In recent times the museum has been re-oriented, as a reaction to the previously unidirectional relationship between the museum as an “imperial power” implicated in exploiting “colonised regions and communities.”¹⁰ The “new museum” remains a political agent in the reconstruction and promotion of cross-cultural dialog, demonstrating the firm linkage with its nineteenth-century lineage.¹¹ For Pietrse the museum, in this new context of multiculturalism in an age of globalization where art and culture cannot be divorced from international politics, exhibits power with cultural and political agency.¹² Just as terrorist groups and networks build their own binary narrative to support and legitimize their operations, and despite recent shifts toward a more progressive posture, the museum remains a “boundary-drawing device” or an “apparatus of difference” that has sought to build national and cultural identity. The museum is an expression or

imagination of the nature of political community, and not simply an apolitical repository for the exhibition of cultural artifacts and objects.¹³ It is important, therefore, to consider the contemporary museum in the context of terrorist targeting.

While the museum has not featured as a particular concern in terrorism scholarship, the topic of terrorist target selection has been subject to some academic attention. In a 1993 article on tactics and trends in terrorist targeting, Bruce Hoffman noted that, while the lethality of terrorist operations had increased from the 1970s to the 1980s, the operational conservatism of terrorist groups was reflected in, among other factors, the continuity of terrorist target selection.¹⁴ More recently, reflecting changes in the post-11 September 2001 terrorism landscape, Ranya Ahmed remarked that while target selection has been “relatively understudied” in terrorism scholarship, it forms a “key operational decision” for terrorist groups, the understanding of which can be critical to the effectiveness of counterterrorism strategies.¹⁵ The challenges in doing so, however, are compounded by the “profoundly complex and dynamic” nature of such processes.¹⁶ Despite such difficulties, a common thread in recent terrorist target selection has been the focus on crowded places, which provide the opportunity for terrorists to inflict casualties (where desirable) and attract significant media and political attention.¹⁷

Decades before the emergence of the now preponderant threat from jihadist terrorism, Brian Jenkins famously posited that terrorists want a lot of people watching and listening, not a lot of people dead.¹⁸ Terrorist violence today is less restrained than when Jenkins’s maxim was first proposed: inflicting casualties is frequently a fundamental objective of groups such as Islamic State and Al Qaeda, and those who act in their name. Nevertheless, achieving maximum media exposure remains an important goal of terrorists of all hues. Terrorism thus continues to be fundamentally a form of communication¹⁹; a provocative expression of political intent that, importantly, seeks to transcend the principal act of violence itself. Terrorist attacks still seek to resonate with a wider audience beyond those immediately targeted, engender fear in a broader population, and, in some cases, provoke a response from the victimized community.²⁰ Within this calculus of communication target sites have maintained a particular symbolism in the values, ideologies, and beliefs that they are understood to represent.²¹ As Anthony Richards noted,

Indeed, terrorism is often perceived as an expressive violence because the message is intended to outweigh the intended impact. ... This “expressive” and “demonstration” effect may be evident in the symbolic nature of terrorist targeting, exemplified in the choice of the iconic targets of US economic and military power of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon respectively, as indeed in the targeting of the British cabinet by the IRA [Irish Republican Army] through the Brighton bomb of 1984. It is the symbolic nature of many terrorist targets that underpins further the psychological impact and the “message” of terrorism.²²

Museums clearly fulfill such instrumental and symbolic targeting criteria. In fact, in his 2019 study of counterterrorism and the protection of vulnerable sites in open societies, Peter Lehr highlighted museums as one of the “plenty” targets in cities that are “critical, vulnerable and

under threat.”²³ Yet much of the attention to date afforded to the interest of jihadist terrorists in relation to museums and cultural objects has focused on the iconoclastic annihilation of artifacts by such terrorist groups in their territorial strongholds: from the bombing of the Bamiyan Buddhas by the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2001²⁴ to the destruction of artifacts in Mosul museum in Iraq, and beyond, in 2015.²⁵ The targeting of such cultural artifacts and objects is not necessarily a new phenomenon.²⁶ Nevertheless, the symbolic and communicative aspects of such attacks have become increasingly apparent in the networked age of mass and social media; for example, through the communication, justification, and celebration of such attacks in Islamic State’s online propaganda.²⁷ Yet, despite an acute concern among security agencies with the problem of “returning foreign fighters” who bring home experiences and skills learned in the operational field in conducting “jihad,”²⁸ significantly less attention has been given to the targeting of museums and cultural objects in the “far enemy” of the West.

Despite this general passivity to considering the museum as a terrorist target, any such attack would be unsurprising to those familiar with the fundamental principles of terrorist targeting and recent jihadist propaganda and operational activity. In early 2014, for example, Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula explicitly highlighted the legitimacy of attacking the Louvre through its online propaganda magazine and operations manual Inspire. A tantalizing glimpse of the strategic interest of Islamic State in the targeting of museums, specifically in the UK, also emerged in early 2016. In a video titled “kill wherever you find them” the Islamic State celebrated the Paris attacks of November 2015 and vowed to undertake further, similar attacks in Europe. The UK featured at the very end of this slick propaganda montage, and among the various British sites highlighted—including, in rapid succession, the Palace of Westminster, Buckingham Palace, Covent Garden, and Trafalgar Square—the National Gallery was the very last to appear. This image can be seen in figure 1 on next page.

There is also evidence, as noted in the introduction, that the targeting of museums in the UK has featured in the recent operational activity of jihadist terrorists. Such evidence supports the case that museums in the UK can certainly be considered as coming within the operational purview and targeting calculus of jihadist terrorists.

Figure 1. Image of the National Gallery as featured in Islamic State video “kill them wherever you find them.”⁷²



The interest of groups such as Islamic State and branches of Al Qaeda toward museums not only resonates with the key principles of terrorist targeting, incorporating both instrumental and symbolic objectives, but also fits squarely into the overall jihadist narrative that justifies the undertaking of mass-casualty, high-impact attacks at such locations. For some time, Western intelligence agencies have located the threat from global jihadist terrorism within the broader context of a “single narrative” that underpins the strategic outlook of such groups and their followers and that seeks to justify acts of extreme political violence.²⁹ This single narrative, initially formulated in the context of a preponderant threat from Al Qaeda, also forms a backdrop to the messaging and violence of Islamic State.³⁰ While the single narrative has oftentimes been considered for the important role it plays in radicalization processes, it also impinges on and influences the overall context of terrorist targeting; and in particular the legitimization of particular targets. In propagating a conspiratorial war against Islam waged by the kafir, groups that adhere to and propagate this single narrative create the conditions within which a wide range of people, groups, activities, and locations can be justifiably targeted for violence: from Parisian café-dwellers, satirical journalists, and concert-goers in the city of prostitution and obscenity; to shoppers, commuters, tourists, soldiers, and police officers in other European cities of the Crusader nations. Through this single narrative the Islamic State and similar terrorist groups propagate and promote a binary “clash of civilizations” between Islam and the West³¹; legitimizing attacks on soft targets and crowded places with symbolic significance. Illustrating the power of the single narrative of global jihadism to effectively frame an array of contemporary and historic events and practices, both the old (imperial) museum and the new (multiculturalism) museum may be considered as legitimate targets due to the political symbolism of both ideas: the former as representative of colonial power and exploitation; the latter as an expression of contemporary ideologies and values of democracy that are antithetical to extremist views. It is in this context that the museum must be re-interpreted as a terrorist target.

The Use of FOI Requests to Research Counterterrorism Security at Museums

Beyond the preceding re-interpretation of the museum as a terrorist target this article is principally informed by data obtained through the submission of FOI requests to 40 museums and 48 police forces in the UK. FOI legislation in the UK—manifest in the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002—stipulates that public authorities are obliged to publish certain information about their activities and that members of the public are entitled to request information from public authorities. FOI legislation in the UK covers over 100,000 public authorities, agencies, and services, regardless of size or nature, including museums.³² Exemptions to disclosure include information relating to national security, where there is also no requirement to confirm or deny that any such information exists. Despite such exemptions, the recent implementation of FOI in the UK reflects a broader international trend in ensuring openness, transparency, and accountability in relation to information held by various levels of government and agencies in the wider public sector. Even as the UK was proposing FOI legislation a range of countries had already passed similar law: from Canada, Australia, and New Zealand to France, Hungary, and Ireland.³³

The intention of the requests made for this study was to establish a baseline of the extent to which museums have been subject to, and participated in, counterterrorism security measures and practices. The forty-eight police forces selected cover all such organizations in the UK. The forty museums were selected on the basis of the most popular museums by public footfall in 2017. This list, obtained from the Association of Leading Visitor Attractions, provided an appropriate array of museums and art galleries from across the UK, with at least one museum or gallery in each of the four nations (England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland).³⁴ The use of FOI legislation to obtain data for the purposes of social research—to identify and examine the policies, processes, and practices of governments and public bodies—has become increasingly common across a range of academic disciplines, including sociology, criminology, and other social sciences, although it still remains underutilized.³⁵ In the discipline of criminology the potential of FOI requests to furnish researchers with data that would be otherwise unobtainable or difficult to access has been recognized for at least a decade. In 2009 Kevin J. Brown, writing from a criminal justice perspective, noted the “lack of awareness” and reluctance to use FOI as a research tool among his peers and colleagues, despite the straightforwardness of its use and the potential to obtain information from agencies that are “data rich but reluctant to publicise.”³⁶ Yet even by 2014 the full potential of this method of research had yet to be realized across the social sciences. As Ashley Savage and Richard Hyde noted,

FOIA [The Freedom of Information Act] is a powerful tool available to researchers. It should be used more readily by social researchers investigating public bodies and/or matters of concern to such bodies, as the large amounts of data held by the State can usefully be employed to develop the analysis of many different research questions.³⁷

While FOI legislation has recently been used by researchers in terrorism³⁸ and policing³⁹ to gain access to data that would otherwise have been unobtainable and inaccessible to them,

the use of this research tool in museum and heritage studies has been limited, if it has been used at all. Even beyond such disciplinary deliberations, the use of FOI as a data-gathering tool remains underutilized in social research more generally, despite its propensity to provide insightful data for subsequent analysis.

The Results of FOI Requests to Research Counterterrorism Security at Museums

Responses to our requests for information varied, with some institutions more willing to supply information than others. Overall, thirty-eight responses were received from museums and forty-eight from police forces. Responses ranged from the refusal to supply any information on the grounds of national security (including almost every police force and some museums) to the comprehensive provision of policy document and information detailing security structures, training, protocols, and communications pertaining to counterterrorism measures in particular museums. This variation in responses may seem initially surprising given that all museums and police forces are subject to the same legislative requirements in regards to FOI. Ben Worthy, however, writing in relation to the impact of FOI on local and central government, has noted how some agencies and institutions are more open than others, with such variable openness dependent on factors such as context, culture, and political leadership.⁴⁰ This article will deal firstly with the FOI responses obtained from the various police forces, before subsequently considering those responses received from museums.

FOI Responses: The Police Service

The FOI requests submitted to forty-eight individual police forces yielded minimal information. An initial request for comprehensive information was sent to one police force as a pilot exercise. The information requested at this stage centered on the work of the police Counter Terrorism Security Advisor (CTSA). The CTSA, as a specialist role in UK policing, was developed and implemented in the period following the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001.⁴¹ CTSAs are based locally in police forces and counterterrorism hubs across the UK, with the primary responsibility to provide protective security advice to private businesses and public sector organizations to prevent, and mitigate the effects of, terrorist acts. The CTSA is responsible for both location-specific site appraisal and the raising of public awareness of terrorism through initiatives such as Project Argus and Project Griffin, which aim to enhance resilience.⁴² CTSA work is therefore firmly aligned to the Protect pillar of CONTEST, the UK's counterterrorism strategy.⁴³ The CTSA role was initially undertaken by sworn police officers, although the current CTSA cadre comprises a mix of both police officers and civilian staff. In the delivery of their duties CTSAs must be fully aware of the contours of the current and emerging threat landscape. This is achieved through, first, close collaboration with police colleagues working in areas of policing aligned with other pillars of CONTEST, particularly Pursue. Second, CTSAs also receive threat assessments and strategic intelligence products from intelligence agencies and then "push out" the threat picture to the businesses and the public. Although this work is delivered locally by CTSAs it is also coordinated through the National Counter Terrorism Security Office, with focus on three key workstreams: crowded

places; critical national infrastructure; and hazardous sites and substances. The museum sector falls within the first of these workstreams.⁴⁴

The initial pilot request for information from police forces particularly focused on obtaining existing and detailed data on the extent to which CTAs delivered counterterrorism security advice to museums and, as a comparator, to other visitor attractions, infrastructure, and public institutions; as well as a description of any advice given. The response of the particular police force subject to this initial request, however, was very limited in the provision of any meaningful information. Much of the requested information was withheld with reference to FOI exemptions relating to terrorism and law enforcement, with specific concerns cited that to confirm or deny the existence of the requested information would undermine the force's policing capabilities and compromise law enforcement tactics.⁴⁵ Given the unwillingness to provide information in response to this pilot request for comprehensive information, a revised, and much more parsimonious, FOI request was subsequently submitted to all UK police forces. This request simply asked:

Since 1 April 2013 have any police officers and/or members of police staff employed by your force, during the course of their duties/roles/responsibilities, delivered counter-terrorism security advice to any museum or art gallery?

However, even in responding to this significantly less detailed request almost every police force refused to provide an answer. In doing so, these police forces neither confirmed or denied that they hold the requested information, again basing their refusal on exceptions in the FOI legislation relating to both national security and law enforcement.⁴⁶ Only one police force, the Ministry of Defense Police, responded fully to the question, stating straightforwardly: "The Ministry of Defence Police have delivered counter terrorism advice to a museum."⁴⁷

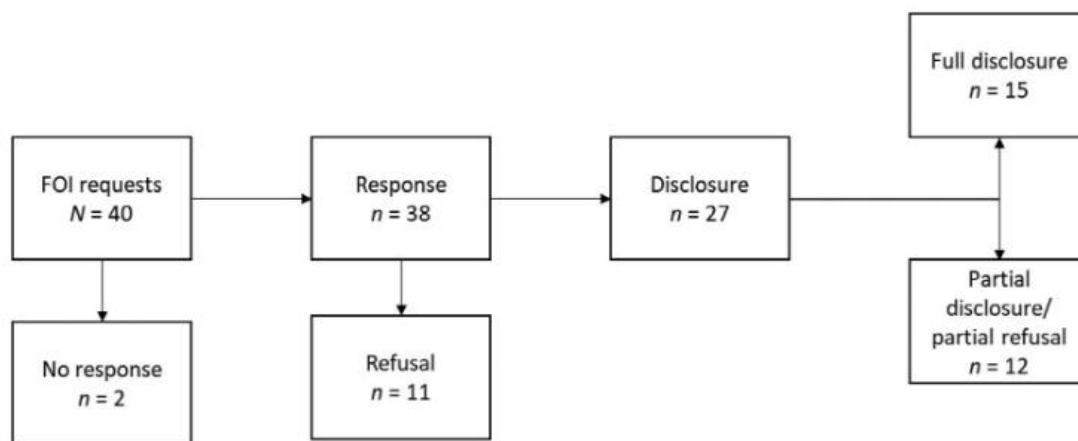
The paucity of data gathered from the submission of FOI requests to every police force in the UK—a not inconsiderable research effort—may suggest, on an initial assessment, that this overall approach is unlikely to provide any significant data on the subject of counterterrorism security in the museum space. Yet, in contrast to the lack of information provided by police forces, the responses received from the forty museums and galleries to which FOI requests were sent yielded some very detailed information on counterterrorism security practices at these locations in the UK.

FOI Responses: Museums

Unlike the forty-eight police forces, all of whom responded to the FOI requests in some shape or form, only thirty-eight of the forty museums contacted provided a response. However, within these thirty-eight responses there was some significant detail provided from twenty-seven museums; fifteen of which responded fully to the requests, with twelve providing partial disclosure/partial refusal (with such refusal based on legislative exemptions). The outcomes of the FOI requests to museums can be seen in figure 2 on next page.

Of the eleven museums that refused to disclose any information, nine replied with a full refusal based on FOI legislative exemptions, with two museums responding that they were not covered by FOI legislation and therefore under no obligation to provide any information. The British Museum in London provided a typical response where there was a refusal to disclose information based on legislative exemptions:

Figure 2. Museum FOI response outcomes.



I can confirm that the Museum holds some of this information. This is information exempt from disclosure under Section 31(1)(a) and (g) of the Freedom of Information Act where disclosure would, or would be likely to, prejudice the prevention or detection of crime and the exercise of the Museum’s functions for purposes (i) and (j) of subsection (2) (securing the health, safety and welfare of persons at work, and protecting persons other than persons at work against risk to health or safety arising out of or in connection with the actions of persons at work). This information is also exempt from disclosure under Section 38 (1) (a) and (b) of the Freedom of Information Act where disclosure would, or would be likely to endanger the physical or mental health of any individual, or endanger the safety of any individual.⁴⁸

As per the legislative requirement the British Museum undertook a “public interest test” in considering whether or not to disclose the information requested:

In applying the public interest test to the use of these exemptions in response to these requests, the Museum accepts the principle that there is a public interest in transparency and accountability through disclosure of information relating to the security of the Museum and that this may help to engender public confidence in the Museum’s security operations in relation to potential threats of terrorism. However the Museum takes the view that disclosure of information concerning details of how its security systems are operated, of the steps it has taken to manage current and on-going potential threats of terrorism and steps it has taken to protect its collection and its visitors from such threats would be likely to make the Museum more vulnerable to such threats, in particular at this time of heightened national security threat levels and recent terrorism incidents. Therefore the Museum concludes that the public

interest clearly lies in favour of withholding this information in response to this request in all the circumstances of this case.⁴⁹

This public interest test was typical of the responses from the nine museums who refused to disclose any information in response to our requests.

The timing of the FOI requests, in mid-2017, was also a factor in the refusal of some museums to disclose any information. In addition to the disrupted terrorist operation targeting the British Museum as previously mentioned, the overall threat climate in mid-2017 was influenced by terrorist attack at Westminster in March of that year, the Manchester Arena bombing in May, the London Bridge attack in June, and the Finsbury Park attack also in June. Within this period the international terrorism threat level in the UK was raised to “Critical,” its highest level, meaning that an attack is expected imminently, for a period of four days following the attack in Manchester. During the rest of the period the international terrorism threat level was at its second highest level of “Severe,” meaning that an attack is highly likely. Our requests for information on counterterrorism security measures at museums were considered in the context of this wider threat climate. For example, the Tate, covering a family of four galleries—including the Tate Britain, Tate Modern, and Tate Liverpool, which were subject to our FOI requests—explicitly referenced recent attacks in its refusal to disclose information:

In light of recent world events, including the very recent acts of terrorism in Westminster and Manchester, Tate considers that to release any information about its security measures and operational matters relating to staff security training would, or would [be] likely to, prejudice Tate’s ability to protect its visitors, staff and property from harm.⁵⁰

Similarly, Glasgow Life, a charity delivering services at museums across the city—including the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, the Riverside Museum, the Gallery of Modern Art, and the People’s Palace, all of which were subject to our FOI requests—responded:

In light of the above, and as the current national threat level of terrorism remains classified as “severe” Glasgow Life is of the view that there is a realistic prospect that the release of information relating to certain counter-terrorism measures and security arrangements at Glasgow Museums, could be utilised in the planning and preparation of a malicious act. Such malicious acts would undoubtedly endanger both the physical and mental health of individuals within our venues.⁵¹

For the Museum of London:

We ... believe that releasing this information would be likely to alert potential terrorists to the preparedness, or lack thereof, of the Museum of London for dealing with a terrorist attack. Given the current UK security threat level rating of Severe, with an attack deemed highly likely, we feel that there could be a causal link between a terrorist gaining knowledge of our preparedness, and the planning and execution of an attack at the Museum of London.⁵²

It is notable that these refusals to disclose information on the basis of existing threat were also prior to the subsequent attacks in June.

Moreover, in addition to a reluctance to disclose information due to the perception of threat and the view that such disclosure would jeopardize the safety of the museum and its staff and patrons, some museums indicated that it was the “public” aspect of disclosure that was of particular concern. FOI disclosures are routinely made available to both the individual requesting the information and the wider public: the former by direct communication, and the latter usually by placing this information on the website of the disclosing body via a “publication scheme.” While our academic credentials and scholarly intentions were recognized, there was a concern amongst some museums over the precedent that may be set through any disclosure and publication of information regarded as sensitive. For the Tate,

Whilst we appreciate that you have requested the information in relation to your academic work, unfortunately a disclosure under FOIA [the FOI Act] is effectively a disclosure to the public at large. If we disclose this information to you, we would have to disclose it to any other person who requested it.⁵³

In e-mail correspondence Royal Museums Greenwich indicated a willingness to discuss these matters on a one-to-one basis as they were “keen to assist” but had “concerns providing the level of detail requested.” Nevertheless, despite the refusals of eleven museums to disclose information based on perceptions of threat and the “public” aspect of disclosure, twenty-seven museums did provide useful information through partial or full disclosure in relation to our requests.

The most comprehensive response to the FOI request submitted for our research was provided by the National Portrait Gallery, which returned thirty-six separate documents, much of which pertained to the routine e-mail correspondence between the museum security manager and police counterterrorism officers (although parts of this correspondence were redacted to remove some personal information). This e-mail correspondence pertained to a variety of issues. On 19 March 2015 a Metropolitan Police CTSA contacted the National Portrait Gallery to provide reassurances following the attack at the Bardo Museum in Tunisia that took place the previous day. The e-mail, with the subject title “Tunisia,” contained advice on Lockdown procedures and Stay Safe guidance, while remarking: “I should reiterate that there is no information to suggest that an attack is being planned on museums/galleries or cultural sites in the UK.”⁵⁴

Much of the disclosed correspondence was routine; for example, indicating that counterterrorism training and awareness-raising seminars were scheduled, to which museums and galleries staff were invited to attend. Other correspondence, however, further indicated the way in which the museum was closely integrated into the counterterrorism policing network. The museum received an update on the Westminster attack on 23 March 2017, the day after the attack took place, with advice and guidance on how businesses in the

area should respond (the National Portrait Gallery is approximately one mile from where the attack took place). This advice was forwarded to all staff in the museum. Similarly, in response to a counterterrorism protective security update, the museum security manager contacted all staff on 24 May 2017 to inform them of the increase in the threat level to Critical, which occurred the previous day. Relevant parts of this e-mail are given below in figure 3, indicating the security measures that the museum had planned in response:

Figure 3. National Portrait Gallery e-mail.

From: [...]
Sent: 24 May 2017 15:56
To: AllStaff
Subject: Security Advice UPDATE 24th May 2017

Dear all,

No doubt you will all be aware that the threat to the UK from Terrorism has moved up to CRITICAL – means an attack is expected IMMINENTLY.

This means that we now have heightened security procedures in place, at the following areas:

- Heightened security at all entrance, including bag searching and monitoring suspicious behaviour
- Restriction of luggage in the cloakroom to carry on size luggage
- High Visibility security patrols around the Gallery and loading bay area

I have attached the latest Counter Terrorism message from the Police, which follows on from yesterday and I will continue to email through updates as I get them.

[...]

At this stage, we do not know how long we will remain at CRITICAL, it is important to remain resilient and consider the longevity of your response plans; as this may go on for several days or even weeks.

If anyone has any specific concerns, please let me know as we are here to advise and support wherever we can.ⁱ

ⁱ FOI response, National Portrait Gallery, 26 May 2017.

It is clear from the comprehensive FOI response from the National Portrait Gallery that the museum was receiving both routine contact and rapid protective security advice from the police counterterrorism network, which was in turn disseminated via the museum security manager to staff across the museum. This communication disclosed the particular nature of counterterrorism policy and practice in the National Portrait Gallery. The remainder of disclosures from other museums gave further indication of the nature and extent of counterterrorism security delivery in the museum environment.

Security Delivery in the Museum Environment

The FOI requests to museums asked for information relating to the management structure of security at these locations, with a view to understanding the various roles with responsibility for designing and delivering security in this space. Any understanding of this task, however, must appreciate that museums are not monolithic in their organization or culture. As Patrick Boylan has remarked,

The growth in museum employment is not only due to the creation of new museums, but also includes the increasing complexity and specialization of museum work internally in relation to the traditional curatorial and collections management duties of collection, conservation, exhibition, and research. There has been a rapid expansion of the museum's role into new important areas of responsibility, particularly the increasing recognition that museums must accept a far wider educational and social role within their society and community.⁵⁶

Museums, particularly the larger establishments, are thus internally heterogeneous and compartmentalized; comprising diverse and distinct departments that are staffed by specialists in their respective fields—from finance, administration, and commercial operations to human resources, education, and collections—each of which will have their own values, tastes, dispositions, and worldviews.

The FOI responses highlighted the ways in which responsibilities for aspects of security in the museum are formally distributed across an array of museum staff: from public-facing visitor services to the less visible senior management team. Importantly, the responses signposted that several museums have a member of staff dedicated solely to leading and delivering security, while others, particularly smaller museums, have a nominated member of staff who has responsibility for security among an array of other roles and functions. In relation to the latter, for example, the Pitt Rivers Museum responded:

The Director of the Museum has ultimate responsibility for security. The Head of Operations, who is also the Security Liaison Officer, currently oversees all aspects of security.⁵⁷

Similarly, for the Museum of Natural History:

The Director of the Museum has ultimate responsibility for security. The Museum's Administrator is the Security Liaison Officer, and she works closely with Oxford University Security Service on security plans and emergency action plans.⁵⁸

Both the Pitt Rivers Museum and the Museum of Natural History are part of the Gardens, Libraries and Museums of the University of Oxford, hence the similarity in the FOI responses.

Several museums responded by indicating that they contract the services of a private security company. For example, the National Gallery provided an organizational chart that linked their own internal head of security to the external company Securitas, who manage some visitor-facing and security staff services for the museum.⁵⁹ The FOI response from the Victoria and Albert, a charity body with responsibility for several museums—including the Victoria and

Albert Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum of Childhood, both of which were subject to our FOI requests— provided an indication of the sometimes complex nature of ensuring the delivery of security, encompassing both public and private actors:

The V&A [Victoria and Albert] has a Security Director with oversight of all aspects of protective security. He chairs the museum['s] Safety and Security Committee and reports to the Senior Management Team and Board of Trustees as appropriate. The museum has an Internal Security Team, a contract security team and ensures that security is embedded in the roles and responsibilities of all staff.⁶⁰

For the Natural History Museum:

The Museum employs a Head of Security and Deputy Head of Security. They oversee all aspects of physical security of the Museum and are accountable for the service delivery. Core Security services are provided by a Contractor.⁶¹

For the smaller Fitzwilliam Museum:

The Museum has a Security Manager and Deputy Security Manager and a team of Security Assistants. All Visitor Services and Technician staff also have collections security duties written into their job descriptions, and security of the collections is viewed as a shared responsibility across all museum staff.⁶²

Interestingly, the Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester provided that their private security contractor was “accredited to deliver the Police’s counter terrorism awareness training, Project Griffin,” and that this contractor had run various training sessions at this museum and other Science Museum sites on a regular basis.⁶³

Irrespective of the structure for delivering security, it was clear that the museums that responded to this question via FOI each have a central point of contact within the museum with responsibility for security delivery and to act as the conduit for information to flow between the museum and the police counterterrorism network. In particular, it was clear that this central point of contact, most commonly a dedicated “museum security manager” provides the channel through which police CTAs deliver security advice and staff training and awareness to museums and organize site risk assessments. National Museums Liverpool, a group with responsibility for several museums—including the Merseyside Maritime Museum, the Museum of Liverpool, the World Museum, and the International Slavery Museum, all of which were subject to our FOI requests—provided:

Our current structure is a security advisor working within Estates and Collections Directorate, acting as a conduit of information from the National Security Advisor and the North West Counter Terrorist Agency [sic].⁶⁴

It is clear from the disclosed information that typical practice involves the museum security manager receiving counterterrorism security advice from the police CTSA, and subsequently communicating this security message, including an awareness of threats from terrorism, across a unique and differentiated organization within which such concerns may not necessarily be at the forefront of museum practitioner or leadership interest. A future challenge for museums in the UK will be in creating confident and competent staff both within and beyond dedicated “security personnel”—from security officers and visitor support to directors, registrars, curators, and conservation experts—who individually and collectively recognize the security imperative, but also balance this against the challenges of widening participation and encouraging diversity at museums.

Summary and concluding remarks

In this article we have sought to highlight both the promise and pitfalls of an underutilized research method that can be used to address an enduring issue in the study of terrorism: the over-reliance on secondary sources.⁶⁵ Drawing on information collected through FOI requests, this article has uncovered the recent development of counterterrorism security practices at museums in the UK; locations that jihadist terrorists have recently targeted through both propaganda and operational activity. Our research has re-interpreted the museum and its meaning within the “single narrative” of global jihadist terrorism, an outlook that justifies and legitimizes the targeting of sociocultural sites from instrumental and symbolic perspectives. Having established this perspective, we proceeded to explore the nature of current counterterrorism security practices at museums. In doing so we signposted the ways in which museums interface with the wider UK counterterrorism policing and security network; primarily through staff dedicated to this task, most commonly a museum security manager. This analysis has demonstrated the value of using FOI as a tool for collecting primary data; addressing, at least in part, the paucity of data highlight by Marc Sageman in his discussion of the stagnation in terrorism research.⁶⁶

Moreover, the use of FOI does not only provide data for terrorism research; it also acts as a form of public sociology, which, for all its criticisms, seeks to move scholarship beyond the ivory tower of academia and toward an engagement in public debate on the nature and future of our social worlds.⁶⁷ As Walby and Luscombe have argued in the context of conducting qualitative research in the social sciences,

FOI not only helps researchers better understand the processual and organizational dynamics of public bodies, it also allows academics, as active citizens, to help hold those in positions of power accountable for their actions.⁶⁸

The publication of FOI data results in the entry of the requested information into the public record, accessible to all, creating opportunity for debate and dialog. Nevertheless, there are clear limitations in using such methods to uncover the policies, processes, and practices of public institutions, particularly in the contexts of counterterrorism and national security.⁶⁹ In particular, organizations may be reluctant to disclose any such information, and subsequently refuse to disclose data based on powerful exemptions in existing legislation or

provide only partial responses. Despite such limitations, the use of FOI in this study did result in the obtaining of data on museum security and counterterrorism policy and practice that were previously unavailable in the public domain to any researcher. It is here, where the use of FOI yields new, but limited, data that the active and attuned social researcher can deploy additional methodological tools (such as qualitative interviews or surveys) and weave these threads together, creating, through the mixing of methods, a richer representation of the subject under inquiry.

We conclude that there is now a requirement for further qualitative inquiry into the museum as an emerging site of counterterrorism security discourse and practice, particularly in relation to how dedicated museum security staff understand and navigate this unique cultural space. Our research indicates that museum security managers, about whom very little is known, play a significant role in mediating security messaging from police CTAs for the museum environment and implementing security measures in response. Museums have thus become a site of securitization, where visitors can now routinely expect to be subject to and experience bag searches, hostile vehicle mitigation, and the screening and interpretation of “suspicious” visitor behavior.⁷⁰ In this way, the museum can now be appropriately considered as another site in the securitization of “frontline leisure.”⁷¹ This represents a germane area for future research and inquiry.

Notes

1 Jonathan R. White, *Terrorism and Homeland Security*, 9th ed. (Boston, MA: Cengage Learning, 2017), 35.

2 Lorenzo Vidino, “European Foreign Fighters in Syria: Dynamics and Responses,” *European View* 13, no. 2 (2014): 219.

3 Malcolm Nance, *Defeating ISIS: Who They Are, How They Fight, What They Believe* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2016), 111–3. Although one must recognize that this targeting of museums is not an exclusively recent phenomenon. Museums have previously been targeted, for example, by the Provisional Irish Republican Army. See A. R. Oppenheimer, *IRA, The Bombs and the Bullets: A History of Deadly Ingenuity*, (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2008), 90.

4 Dipesh Gadhur, “Museums Put on Alert for Isis Suitcase Bomb,” *The Sunday Times*, February 19, 2017, <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/museums-put-on-alert-for-isis-suitcase-bomb-3wk0h6b3n>.

5 A recent comparative study of museum security in Finland and England, although recognizing that museum security is underrepresented in museological discourse, paid only passing attention to terrorism within a wider constellation of threats. Louise Grove and Suzie Thomas, “‘The Rhino Horn on Display Has Been Replaced by a Replica’: Museum Security in Finland and England,” *Journal of Conservation and Museum Studies* 14, no. 1 (2016): 1–11.

6 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006).

7 Simon Knell has engaged with Anderson's concept of "imagined community" to understand the role of the museum in creating the boundaries of political community, with museums providing the stage for the performance the "myths of nationhood." Interestingly, this Andersonian concept has also recently been applied to understand the strong appeal of the ideology of Islamic State in its own community- and state-building project. Simon Knell, "National museums and the national imagination," in *National Museums: New Studies from Around the World*, ed. Simon Knell, Peter Aronsson, Arne Bugge Amundsen, Amy Jane Barnes, Stuart Burch, Jennifer Carter, Viviane Gosselin, Sally Hughes, and Alan Kirwan (London: Routledge, 2011). See also Mariano Barbato, Sinja Hantscher, and Markus Lederer, "Imagining Jihad," *Global Affairs* 2, no. 4 (2016): 419–29.

8 Nick Prior, *Museums & Modernity: Art Galleries and the Making of Modern Culture* (Oxford: Berg, 2002), 38–42.

9 See Wakefield, "Museum Development in the Gulf," in *UAE and the Gulf: Architecture and Urbanism Now*, ed. George Katodrytis and Kevin Mitchell (London: John Wiley and Sons, 2015); Karen Exell, *Modernity and the Museum in the Arabian Peninsula* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016); and Alvaro Higuera, "The Making of a New National Museum in Peru," *American Anthropologist*, 119, no. 1 (2017): 136–8.

10 Laura Peers and Alison K. Brown, "Introduction," in *Museums and Source Communities: A Routledge Reader*, ed. Laura Peers and Alison K. Brown (London: Routledge, 2003), 1.

11 Kylie Message, *New Museums and the Making of Culture* (Oxford: Berg, 2006), 198–9.

12 Jan Nederveen Pieterse, "Multiculturalism and Museum: Discourse about Others in the Age of Globalization," in *Heritage, Museums and Galleries: An Introductory Reader*, ed. Gerard Corsane (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), 176–8.

13 Alessandra De Angelis, Celeste Ianniciello, Mariangela Orabona, and Michaela Quadraro, "Introduction: Disruptive Encounters – Museums, Arts and Postcoloniality," in *The Postcolonial Museum*, ed. Iain Chambers, Alessandra De Angelis, Celeste Ianniciello, Mariangela Orabona, and Michaela Quadraro (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 11–2.

14 Bruce Hoffman, "Terrorist Targeting: Tactics, Trends, and Potentialities," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 5, no. 2 (1993): 12–29.

15 Ranya Ahmed, "Terrorist Ideologies and Target Selection," *Journal of Applied Security Research* 13, no. 3 (2018): 376–90.

16 Cato Hemmingby and Tore Bjørgo, *The Dynamics of a Terrorist Targeting Process: Anders B. Breivik and the 22 July Attacks in Norway* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

17 David McIlhatton, James Berry, David Chapman, Pernille H. Christensen, John Cuddihy, Rachel Monaghan, and Dan Range, "Protecting Crowded Places from Terrorism: An Analysis of the Current Considerations and Barriers Inhibiting the Adoption of Counterterrorism Protective Security Measures," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Latest Articles (2018).

18 Brian Jenkins, "International Terrorism: A Balance Sheet," *Survival* 17, no. 4 (1975): 158.

19 See Ronald D. Crelinsten, "Analysing Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism: A Communication Model," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 14, no. 2 (2010): 77–122; Jonathan Matusitz, *Terrorism and Communication: A Critical Introduction* (London: SAGE, 2013).

20 Although the intention to cause fear and intimidation as a key definitional characteristic of terrorism has recently been contested. See Erson N. Kurtulus, "Terrorism and Fear: Do Terrorists Really Want to Scare?" *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 10, no. 3 (2017): 501–22.

21 Isabelle Duyvesteyn, "How New Is the New Terrorism?" in *Terrorism Studies: A Reader*, ed. John Horgan and Kurt Braddock (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), 35.

22 Anthony Richards, *Conceptualizing Terrorism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 59.

23 Peter Lehr, *Counter-Terrorism Technologies: A Critical Assessment* (Cham: Springer, 2019), 42.

24 Francesco Francioni and Federico Lenzerini, "The Destruction of the Buddhas of Bamiyan and International Law," *European Journal of International Law* 14, no. 4 (2003): 619–51.

25 Alexander A. Bauer, "Editorial: The Destruction of Heritage in Syria and Iraq and Its Implications," *International Journal of Cultural Property* 22, no. 1 (2015): 1–6.

26 Irish Republicans have been historically linked to the destruction of symbols of British oppression. See McBride, "Introduction: Memory and National Identity in Modern Ireland," in *History and Memory in Modern Ireland*, ed. Ian McBride (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 2.

27 Claire Smith, Heather Burke, Cherrie de Leijen, and Gary Jackson, "The Islamic State's Symbolic War: Da'esh's Socially Mediated Terrorism as a Threat to Cultural Heritage," *Journal of Social Archaeology* 16, no. 2 (2016): 164–88; also Ömür Harmanşah, "ISIS, Heritage, and the Spectacles of Destruction in the Global Media," *Near Eastern Archaeology* 78, no. 3 (2015): 170–77.

28 Lasse Lindekilde, Preben Bertelsen, and Michael Stohl, "Who Goes, Why, and with What Effects: The Problem of Foreign Fighters from Europe," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 27, no. 5 (2016): 858–77; R. Kim Cragin, "The November 2015 Paris Attacks: The Impact of Foreign Fighter Returnees," *Orbis* 61, no. 2 (2017): 212–26; and R. Kim Cragin, "The Challenge of Foreign Fighter Returnees," *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice* 33, no. 3 (2017), 292–312.

29 Michael King and David M. Taylor, "The Radicalization of Homegrown Jihadists: A Review of Theoretical Models and Social Psychological Evidence," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 23, no. 4 (2011): 608; and Philipp Holtman, "Countering Al-Qaeda's Single Narrative," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 7, no. 2 (2013), 141–6.

30 Greg Simons, "Islamic Extremism and the War for Hearts and Minds," *Global Affairs* 2, no. 1 (2016): 91–9; Hararo J. Ingram, "An Analysis of Islamic State's Dabiq Magazine," *Australian Journal of Political Science* 51, no. 3 (2016): 458–77.

31 Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (London: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

32 Elizabeth Shepherd, "Freedom of Information, Right to Access Information, Open Data: Who Is at the Table?" *The Round Table* 104, no. 6 (2015): 719.

33 Maurice Frankel, "Freedom of Information Act," *International Review of Law, Computers & Technology* 12, no. 1 (1998): 121–46.

34 Association of Leading Visitor Attractions, "2017 Visitor Figures," <http://www.alva.org.uk/details.cfm?p=608>.

35 Alex Luscombe and Kevin Walby, "High Policing and Access to Information," *Police Practice and Research* 16, no. 6 (2015): 485–98; Kevin Walby and Alex Luscombe, "Criteria for Quality in Qualitative Research and Use of Freedom of Information Requests in the Social Sciences," *Qualitative Research* 17, no. 5 (2016): 537–53; and K. Kevin Walby and Alex Luscombe, "Ethics Review and Freedom of Information Requests in Qualitative Research," *Research Ethics* 14, no. 4 (2018): 1–15.

36 Kevin J. Brown, "COUNTERBLAST: Freedom of Information as a Research Tool: Realising Its Potential," *The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice* 48, no. 1 (2009): 88.

37 Ashley Savage and Richard Hyde, "Using Freedom of Information Requests to Facilitate Research," *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 17, no. 3 (2014): 315.

38 Tufyal Choudary, "Campaigning on Campus: Student Islamic Societies and Counterterrorism," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 40, no. 12 (2017): 1004–22.

39 Sarah Kingston, Amy Elliott, and Terry Thomas, “‘Cost’ Calculations as a Barrier to Gaining Information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 from the Police in England and Wales,” *Policing and Society*, Latest Articles.

40 Ben Worthy, “‘Some are More Open than Others’: Comparing the Impact of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 on Local and Central Government in the UK,” *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis: Research and Practice* 15, no. 5 (2013): 395–414.

41 To a certain extent the CTSA role drew on, at least in part, the skills, experience, and outlook of the more well-established “crime prevention officer role” in policing. For an overview of this see Kate J. Bowers, “Small Business Crime: The Evaluation of a Crime Prevention Initiative,” *Crime Prevention and Community Safety* 3, no. 1 (2001): 23–42.

42 See James A. Malcolm, “Project Argus and the Resilient Citizen,” *Politics* 33, no. 4 (2013): 311–21; T. Prenzler and Rick Sarre, “The Role of Partnerships in Security Management,” in ed. Martin Gill, *The Handbook of Security* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014). In some police force areas CTSA work in conjunction with Counter Terrorism Awareness Advisors (CTAAs), whose role is to support CTSA through the delivery of counterterrorism security awareness briefings and presentations about the effects of terrorism.

43 The four pillars of CONTEST are “pursue” (to stop terrorist attacks), “prevent” (to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism), “protect” (to strengthen protection against a terrorist attack), and “prepare” (to mitigate the impact of a terrorist attack).

44 In some rare instances CTSA may also engage with museums that store hazardous substances.

45 FOI response, Police Scotland, 27 April 2017.

46 A smaller number of police forces responded to this request by stating that the information was not held centrally and that the work and cost involved in obtaining this information was such that the request could not be fulfilled, and an exemption under section 12(1) of FOIA thus applied.

47 FOI response, Ministry of Defence Police, 3 July 2017.

48 FOI response, British Museum, 7 June 2017.

49 FOI response, British Museum, 7 June 2017.

50 FOI response, Tate, 1 June 2017.

51 FOI response, Glasgow Life, 2 June 2017

52 FOI response, Museum of London, 19 May 2017.

53 FOI response, Tate, 1 June 2017.

54 FOI response, National Portrait Gallery, 26 May 2017.

55 FOI response, National Portrait Gallery, 26 May 2017.

56 Patrick J. Boylan, "The Museum Profession," in *A Companion to Museum Studies*, ed. Sharon Macdonald (Oxford: Blackwell, 2011), 417.

57 FOI, Pitt Rivers Museum, 7 June 2017.

58 FOI response, Museum of Natural History, 7 June 2017.

59 FOI response, National Gallery, 22 May 2017.

60 FOI response, Victoria and Albert, 6 June 2017.

61 FOI response, Natural History Museum, 31 May 2017.

62 FOI response, Fitzwilliam Museum, 25 May 2017.

63 FOI response, Science Museum Group, 6 June 2017. The Science Museum Group covers the Science Museum, the National Railway Museum, the National Science and Media Museum, and the Museum of Science and Industry; all of which sites were subject to FOI requests for this study.

64 FOI response, Museums Liverpool, 6 June 2017.

65 Bart Schuurman, "Research on Terrorism, 2007–2016: A Review of Data, Methods, and Authorship," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Latest Articles (2018).

66 Marc Sageman, "The Stagnation in Terrorism Research," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 26, no. 4 (2014).

67 Michael Burawoy, "Public Sociologies: Contradictions, Dilemmas, and Possibilities," *Social Forces* 82, no. 4 (2004): 1603–18.

68 Kevin Walby and Alex Luscombe, "Ethics Review and Freedom of Information Requests in Qualitative Research," *Research Ethics* 14, no. 4 (2018): 11.

69 Alex Luscombe and Kevin Walby, "High Policing and Access to Information," *Police Practice and Research* 16, no. 6 (2015): 485–98.

70 Mike Maguire's research on airport security highlights, for example, the use of the Behaviour Assessment Screening System by practitioners to surveil passengers and identify suspicious behaviours and activities. Mike Maguire, "Counter-Terrorism in European Airports," in *The Anthropology of Security: Perspectives from the Frontline of Policing, Counter-terrorism and Border Control*, ed. Mike Maguire, Catarina Frois, and Nils Zurawski (London: Pluto Press, 2014): 130. Lucia Zedner has highlighted how security technologies, policies, and practices that are initially considered as "exceptional," such as those at airports, are subsequently replicated and routinized in other spaces of everyday life. Lucia Zedner, *Security* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), 149.

71 Debbie Lisle, "Frontline Leisure: Securitizing Tourism in the War on Terror," *Security Dialogue* 44, no. 2 (2013): 127–46. In the United States, for example, Laura Frost has remarked upon the 'security gauntlet' that must be overcome in order to enter the National September 11 Memorial Museum in New York, in a process very much akin to airport security. Laura Frost, "No Safe Spaces: Notes on the National September 11 Museum," *Journal of Urban Cultural Studies* 4, no. 1/2 (2017): 221–39.

72 Coincidentally, at the vigil held at Trafalgar Square on 23 March 2017—the day after the terrorist attacks in Westminster—the attendant politicians and police officers addressed the crowd from the front steps of the National Gallery.